



FEMA

Fact Sheet

COBRATF Management Review Findings Update

FEMA's Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP) includes the Chemical, Ordnance, Biological, and Radiological Training Facility (COBRATF), where FEMA offers civilian training with live chemical and biological agents.

The CDP will resume using chemical agents and biologicals in some of its hazardous materials training courses on Jan. 11.

In late 2016, FEMA suspended all chemical and biological operations at COBRATF, after it was discovered that the COBRATF had received, via third party vendor, and had been using a more toxic version of ricin in training than what the CDP had ordered.

It followed by conducting a thorough internal management review of COBRATF. This review confirmed that existing protocols at the COBRATF prevented any harm to staff and students working with the more toxic version of ricin. However, it did recommended improvements in eight key areas: Training Operations, Agent Verification, External Oversight, Internal Quality Management, Facilities Management, Personal Protective Equipment, Workforce Development and Strategic Partnerships.

The CDP staff has worked diligently to enact the recommendations.

For example, to resume training with the materials, the CDP will purchase ricin A-chain from a different vendor in the CDC's Select Agent Program. CDP staff have visited and validated the reliability of the vendor's processes. The vendor will ship orders to a laboratory at DHS's National Bioforensic Analysis Center for analysis and verification before they're shipped to the CDP for use in training.

Students and staff at the COBRATF will conduct training in National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)-approved respirator masks, which are fully compliant with OSHA respiratory protection standards.

And, a formal advisory board for the facility is being created, which will include representatives from a number of national (DoD, DHS, OSHA, etc.) occupational safety and health and compliance assurance offices and agencies.

To date, the CDP has completed 60 of the 65 total recommendations, including all critical recommendations, in the review. The CDP will complete the remaining recommendations over the coming months.

The CDP trains up to 2,500 civilian first responders a year to detect and operate in environments with chemical, biological and nuclear materials. This advanced, hands-on training builds confidence in those responders to effectively respond to real-world incidents involving those materials throughout the nation.

Overall, the CDP trains up to 50,000 students annually, from public health, public works and emergency management officials to hazardous material specialists, law enforcement specialists, firefighters, and doctors, nurses and other health care workers. The students come from all states and U.S. territories, as well as a number of foreign countries.

In July, the CDP reached an historic milestone when it trained its one millionth student.

The CDP first opened its doors in 1998.

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